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Education for citizenship in the multicultural society of Latvia

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Introduction

Socio-political and ethno-cultural changes at the turn of the 20-21st centuries have made the question of spiritual essence in a person's self determination in ethno-cultural discourse increasingly topical. Latvia is a multicultural society that comprises both the Latvian ethnos and a number of other ethno-cultural diasporas. The problem of citizenship education is especially important under the conditions of a multicultural society. Education and upbringing in this context is understood to mean assistance in forming purposeful values and attitudes in young people, helping them to build up a decent life-style acceptable to them in their future, while preserving and strengthening individual personality as a unique and inimitable 'self'. A teacher working to bring up junior adolescents citizens directs the pupils to comprehend and realise values such as treating human being as universal phenomena, attitude to family, home, and motherland – the basic human roots. The citizenship education content treats these values as fundamental for building a system, determining a world outlook of a person.

The aim of this article is to determine the theoretical foundation for citizenship education, work out the cultural component of a literary educational content model in the formation of citizen feeling, and analyse the results of testing the model in the real educational process.

The cultural component model of the content of education

The experiment in basic values education took place in a Russian-language school in Forms 5 and 6. Here the problem is particularly topical and complex due to the peculiarities of the socio-political situation in Latvia at present. The basis of the experiment was the creation of the cultural component of educational content in literature classes. The cultural component of the literary educational content represents a system with the following interconnected aspects:

- the subject content, which includes the cultural experience of humankind in the form of knowledge
- the activity content, which reveals ways of acting within the system of culture in the form of skills
- the subjective content which includes personal cultural experience in the sphere of emotions and values, and is disclosed in the cultural needs, motivation, interests, and the system of values.

Ways of structuring

The following aspects were taken into account and laid as the foundation while structuring the literary educational content:

- the idea of a concentric structure of problem topics, which presupposes the grouping of fiction around transparent cultural topics which determine a problem (a person and his/her roots: family – home – motherland, etc)
- the idea of a dialogue in the cultural component in the literary educational content.

Implementation of the problem-topic concentric structure while formulating educational content in literature lessons

The beginning of the experimental work was marked by the systematic development of transparent, culturally charged topics for Russian literature lessons in ethnic minority schools. The patriotic feelings of a Russian-speaker from Latvia depends on the development of his or her cultural identity. In this connection it was important for us to analyse the research made by both western and Russian philosophers and psychologists-anthropologists dedicated to the study of the Russian ethnic identity. This has been reflected on and thoroughly researched by Russian religious philosophers following Russian and European scientific thought synthesis (Berdyaev 1990; Ilyin 1993). The ethnic Russian character was actively analysed also in the works of western psychologists in the 1950s and 1960s (Erickson 1996). Nowadays – as the cultural paradigm is changing – the ‘citizen problem’ is the attention of research. To develop a pupil capable of integrating into the Latvian multicultural context, and taking into account our principle that the citizen’s feelings development is closely linked to an ethnic minority school pupil’s cultural identity development, it is of utmost importance for us not to emphasise the peculiarities of the Russian people but to show with detailed examples that the culture of every ethnos is indeed a special form of the universal essence of man. This essence is created in the process of a complex multilevel development of humankind.

We chose a particular scheme of cultural education as the general basis for citizens’ feelings development. This scheme is based on touching on global problems which are equally important for any ethnic group at any step in its historic development. In choosing such topics we were guided by the widely known concept of Klakhohn and Strodtbeck, which determines that people of all cultures must solve the same common human problems and that potential solutions exist in every culture. Klakhohn and Strodtbeck single out the following:

- the attitude towards the human nature,
- the attitude towards nature and ‘supernatural’,
- the attitude towards time,
- the branches of human activities, and
- the attitude of a human being towards other human beings (Klakhohn and Strodtbeck 1961).

Thus, while structuring pedagogically meaningful transparent cultural topics, we also aim at considering universal human values of culture in the global aspect, and to gradually direct pupils towards a realisation of the diversity in human culture and dialogue as the only productive form of cultural interaction. In practice this means that each topic contains a system of micro-topics based on dominant concepts. The concepts of culture with embedded universal human values was a common ground for comparing the content

of different cultures, and this allowed us to compare attitudes towards human values in various cultures. This system includes concepts which reflect historical-cultural, ethno-cultural, socio-cultural, and semiotic background knowledge in the content. The centre or nuclei of each micro-topic became a work of fiction chosen for this particular age-group. These factors allowed us to build the following system of transparent cultural topics and relevant educational content into the first circle of micro-topics.

The system of transparent cultural topics and relevant to educational content in the first circle of micro-topics

Transparent cultural topic	Micro-topic
A person and his roots: family – home – motherland	folk family traditions family – home – motherland
A person in the human world	loneliness strive for understanding the world of children and the world of adults human memories and gratitude
A human being – nature – power	nature and time powerful and weak people serving the Motherland

The cultural topic of ‘a person and his roots: family – home – motherland’ was developed for bringing up feelings of citizenship: love for Latvia as one’s motherland, one’s home. We used role play: ‘Commenting on a text’. The class was divided into groups, each of which studied a text as ‘historians’, ‘artists’, ‘actors’ or ‘directors’. They had to prepare a commentary on the text. We also used tasks to reveal the pupils’ emotional world and relationships: ‘Latvia is your home. Would you like your home to become better? Write an article about this’. The majority of pupils wrote that they loved Latvia and would try to make it a better place, but there were also children who wrote that although their parents had been born in Latvia, they were not citizens of the country, and the children felt sad that Latvia had not become a home for them.

Development of citizen education

It is important to develop a citizenship literacy in the young adolescent age group. Citizenship literacy is taken to be the sum of skills which includes not only basic literacy (speech and writing skills) but also abilities which allow participation in the democratic community, such as critical thinking, acting thoughtfully in morally challenging situations, and empathic skills that help to hear and help others. Developing citizen literacy is implemented at school under the moral content of citizenship in a democratic society. It promotes interaction between the moral feelings and critical thinking abilities. The educational programme which develop citizenship literacy are based on the principle of raising of the linguistic and literary training level. This process includes:

- the link between the content of education and school research in literature lessons
- pupils’ participation in meaningful literary project work
- stimulation of interest and responsibility in pupils.

The methodological solution for this problem was as follows. The problems with a historical-cultural context were studied in literature lessons together with historical documents and primary resources. Literature became a historical dialogue with the culture of the country. Pupils were involved in the discussion of problems, disputes, and an analysis of the country's cultural values. A system of pre-reading text, questions and tasks was developed. We implemented three pedagogical problems,

1. the formation of thinking skills through a detailed analysis of a literary work;
2. the pupils' ability to inquire into the cultural historical epoch which is described in the literary work; and
3. the pupil's subjective experience was included in the process of studies: his opinion, questions, impressions which could be directly connected with the problems described in the literary work.

The first two problems were solved through tasks repeated through the process of studying each micro-topic. They were directed at the perception of the titles by pupils, epigraphs, the time-space arrangement of the literary work, and the appearance and behaviour of the characters. For the third problem, we used questions offered to the pupils for consideration either at home or at the beginning of a lesson. It became clear during the experiment that the effectiveness of teaching and learning grows if problem-type questions are used constantly. At the beginning of the experiment the pupils were asked to answer the following pre-reading problem questions:

Try to understand why the literary work has this particular title while reading it.

Explain the meaning of the epigraph.

What was particularly interesting (surprising, unusual, funny, sad, etc) while reading the work?

In order to attract the pupils' attention to the colourful picture of a cultural-historical epoch and to create a primary impression about the life and views of the people of that time, we used typical tasks containing factual or illustrational material. For example, the lesson dedicated to Ancient Russian Scripts began with viewing the pictures of the interior and exterior of Russian churches and monasteries of the 12th-14th centuries. The students were advised 'to approach the churches, enter the churches, and listen to the prayers of that epoch's people'. The study of the cultural resources was an effective way to develop citizen feelings, since this process emphasises the moral content of citizenship in a democratic society.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results of the study allowed us to determine the conditions for citizen upbringing in Latvia. These conditions are as follows:

- the change of the social situation in Latvia
- integration of the Latvian society
- educating school pupils as citizens.

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